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the possible authorship of this (presumably mythical) Blihis, and the suggestion is accepted by the printer, who informs us on the inside of the cover, in a pretty design figuring a tombstone, that the aforesaid Master Blihis *floruit circa* 1200-1250. Suppose this to be the case, it is plain the production could not present the original type of the history, and antedate a poem composed at least a generation earlier.

The reader, however, may be left to decide on the literary merits of the French romance; to Mr. Evans is due thanks for having put a curious novel, so to speak, of the thirteenth century within the reach of the English-speaking public.

*W. W. Newell.*

BIRD GODS. By CHARLES DE KAY. With an accompaniment of decorations by George Wharton Edwards. New York: A. S. Barnes & Co. (n. d.) Pp. xix, 249.

Mr. de Kay very justly remarks that in the study of man's groping toward religious belief, the influence of birds and beasts has been (until lately) neglected, whereas in the daily life of savages these were and are objects as important as the phenomena of light and air. He therefore undertakes to call attention to remains in the early lore of Europe of a very extensive connection of birds with gods, pointing to a worship of the bird as representative of the deity. He follows in mythology, epic poetry, and legends the traces of certain birds, selecting the dove, woodpecker, cuckoo, peacock, owl, swan, and eagle, and undertakes to show how their peculiarities and habits, observed with keenness, have laid the foundation for elements of various religions and mythologies, and supplied the skeleton of plots on which have been built numerous myths and tragedies. He points out that modern historical science supposes rather mixture of conquering races with their predecessors than eradication, and thinks that old beliefs reveal the influence of non-Aryan peoples. When the origin of a divinity or of one aspect of a divinity, depended on original bird nature, in the natural course of things the animal became humanized, and in the end the bird remained only as a symbol of which the meaning was forgotten. Recognition of the honor once assigned to birds, he suggests, may have some tendency to shame modern descendants of the worshippers into taking some pains to prevent the extinction of bird life.

The method of conception of the author may be illustrated by examples. Aphrodite is drawn by doves, because in the spring that bird shines in his finest feather, and is especially ardent in love-making. Herodotus relates the account of the prophetesses at Dodona, that the oracle was established at the command of a black dove, which settled in an oak-tree; the grove at Dodona may have been presumed to have been a shrine of the Pelasgians, sacred to divinities ruder than Zeus and his daughter. In the Greek dove-name oinás is to be found the source of the name Æneas, who is to be regarded as the dove god humanized. The capture of Venus by Vulcan in a golden net is the survival of a bird-characteristic. The prophetic quality of the woodpecker is explained by his habit of drumming on a dead

limb; this was supposed to be indicative of rain, and so the creature was made a thunder-bird. Thus *Picus* the woodpecker became an Italian deity. His custom of excavating a cavity caused him to be supposed cognizant of hidden treasures. With *Picus* Mr. de Kay correlates the Estonian *Pikker*; in the temple-huts of these tribes, heathen until the twelfth century, we should have found wooden images of such a bird god. In the *Kalevala* we have a "hero with the scarlet headgear," *Nyyrikki*, who blazes a path for the hunter; this personage is the woodpecker. With augurs ravens and crows were greater favorites, by reason of their distinct voices.

The cuckoo is sacred to spring, because of his mysterious cry. The cuckoo lays its egg in the nest of another bird, and is said also to remove the eggs of the foster-mother after its own child has been hatched. He was therefore regarded as a criminal. Mr. de Kay thinks that numerous folk-tales and myths are to be traced to this reputation; he ventures to suggest that the story of *Siegfried* is the echo of a cuckoo myth. The myths that deal with marriage within prohibited degrees, and those treating of the devouring by a father of his own children may be explained in similar manner. The Irish hero *Cuchulainn* was originally a cuckoo god; he bears harness at seven years of age, because a young cuckoo is fledged in seven weeks; his feat of driving off fifty boy-princes is a survival of the cuckoo's exploits in ridding the nest of foster-brothers; his distortion in battle is the ruffling up of the feathers of the bird. The early bird-god literature among Akkads offers parallels. The writer suggests to anthropologists that the habit of *couvade* may have owed its origin to observation of the habits of birds and childlike imitation. The owl rids fields of mice; it is assigned to *Pallas Athene*, because it can see in the dark; the attribution shows that originally the goddess must have been nocturnal. Before wisdom was associated with the deity, *Pallas* may have been evolved from an owl into a *psychopompos* or soul-guide.

The eagle is famous in myth, not merely on account of his power and swiftness, but because of the great age and ability of rejuvenescence assigned to him.

Myths belonging to the category dealt with by the writer bear every evidence of belonging to a much ruder age; parallels with Finnish mythology, for example, seem to demand the early existence in Greece of a people akin in mental traits to Finnish tribes, which lent important elements to Greek mythology.

Such is an outline of the views of Mr. de Kay, who has written a brief but suggestive book on a very difficult subject. Even the complications of philology seem simple in comparison with the tangle of mythology. Whenever inference enters into the discussion, when it is necessary to go beyond the definite statements of the source, the difficulty of passing from conjecture to demonstration is almost insuperable. The key offered by comparative etymology based on mere assonance is almost always merely *defusive*. Only the broadest generalizations will usually be found capable of proof. The extent to which, in ancient art, the ascription of animal tokens to dei-

ties is to be explained as a relic of ancient beast worship, and the degree to which it is to be allowed purely symbolic, is full of uncertainty. Of symbolism we have examples in the animal figures still associated with the evangelists, and especially in the representation of Christ as a lamb bearing the cross. The requirements of ancient art in a degree explain such animal presentation. Equally involved are the principles of ethnological theory. That the Aryan races had a different way of looking at the universe, or in respect to their forms of divinities were more advanced than their non-Aryan neighbors, or that simple and rude beliefs and usages imply the presence of lower racial elements, are propositions at least not established. The very literary character of the material ought also to be considered; such is especially the case in regard to the late and highly sophisticated Welsh mediæval folk-lore. When, therefore, the attempt is made to trace a particular human story to an animal origin, there are countless probabilities of error. But these remarks are offered merely by way of pointing out the caution to be observed, and by no means with intent to cast doubt on the general correctness of the author's theme, that animal mythology antedates the humanized versions of ancient literature.

*W. W. Newell.*